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The Gorer Porcelains at the Waldorf-Astoria.

By Gustav Kobbe.



CHINESE porcelains are the old masters among ceramics. Prized by collectors above all other ceramic ware, they also possess an innate beauty that allows them to be appreciated even by the casual beholder. An exhibition of Chinese porcelains of the highest quality is an "event," and when conducted as if a private collection were being shown in a drawing room, an event to which readers of THE LOTUS certainly would wish their attention called.

The Gorer porcelains are being shown in a room on the first floor of the Waldorf-Astoria. Most of them are examples which Mr. Edgar Gorer, of London, secured from the collection of Sir William Bennett. Sir William is an eminent surgeon who selected his Chinese porcelains with the taste of a connoisseur, and during a period of thirty years

THE when fine pieces were more readily obtained than
LOTUS now. Everyone knows how enjoyable is an exhibition of a comparatively small number of very choice objects of art. The visitor is not overwhelmed by numbers. He has an opportunity to familiarize himself with every object shown—to let its beauty sink in. This is what makes the Gorer exhibition so attractive. It is small ; and it is choice.

Several objects of great interest are shown in cabinets in the middle of the floor space so that the visitor can examine the exhibits from every point of view. The centre of interest is, no doubt, an oviform black hawthorn vase, which has been very well characterized by Claude Phillips as a "Fragonard among Chinese porcelains." For whether one regards the soft gloss of the black enamelled background, or the subtle brilliancy of the decoration, both in its design and coloring, it is a masterpiece of the Kang-He period. I have heard a story to the effect that a Chinese widow who, owing to some legal formality, was obliged to marry again, had herself wedded to a vase. The vase in the Gorer collection did not figure in this ceremony. It did, however, in another. For it

was the guest of honor at a banquet given to it by a high Chinese official, who thus testified to his admiration of it as one of the supreme products of his native art.



THE decorations are of large peony and hawthorn trees, the stems in aubergine, the foliage green, while the flowers glow with a rich rouge de fer.

Green rockwork gives solidity to the decoration near the foot on the back of the vase. On this rockwork stands a Ho Ho bird and from the side springs a large blossoming begonia tree. High up on the neck, another bird sweeps by in flight; and a trifle higher, topping off the decoration with one of those last touches that mean so much in a design, a bee hovers over the highest blossom.

While I was looking at this vase a collector, who has a small but extremely well chosen cabinet of porcelains, came in and carefully examined this piece from all sides. Then standing a little distance from it, he seemed completely absorbed in contemplation of it. "No painting in the world could be more

THE beautiful," he said at last. And, indeed, this is a
LOTUS wonderful vase.

In the same case with it are two others. To the right, when viewed from the front, is one of amphora shape with short neck, covered entirely with a thick amethyst colored enamel, on which are large lotus lillies, leaves, birds and other details in brilliant greens and other colors. Several of the birds are wading among the flowering lotusses. The other remaining vase in this case is square shaped tapering downwards and ending in an expanding body. Flowers of the four seasons on backgrounds of green and yellow, the decoration alternating in the foot and neck, give unique distinction to this vase, which, like the preceding one dates back to the Ming period.

The visitor, however, is not unlikely to linger quite as long before an exquisite garniture of five pieces in another of the cabinets.

This garniture is not too large to be obtrusive, nor too small to be insignificant. It is, in fact, of just the correct proportions, singly and in relation to its component parts, for beauty. Were a poet to write a poem of five dreamy stanzas, or had Beet-

hoven composed his eighth symphony in five movements, we would have something with which to compare this garniture. Then, too, there is a pretty story of amenities between collectors connected with it. The centre vase originally belonged to the late George Salting and was many years exhibited with his collection in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. The label with Mr. Salting's name is still on the base of this centre vase. Meanwhile Sir William Bennett had acquired the other four pieces. It seemed a pity that the five pieces should not be reunited either by the four Bennett pieces going to the Salting collection, or the one Salting piece going to Sir William. To the latter end, which appeared the fairer, Mr. Gorer opened negotiations. Mr. Salting recognized the justice of the proposal and sold, out of the museum, the centre vase of the garniture, which thus was once more assembled after many years of separation. The coming of the five pieces by chance into the possession of two English collectors, their discovery and reunion, form one of the romances in the story of Chinese porcelain collecting.

The garniture comprises three vases and covers



THE and two beakers. All are hexagonal in form. Black
LOTUS pencilled rings on a rich green enamel produce a design of waves on the background. On these waves are flowers represented as floating on the water. In the centre portion of the beakers the decoration is relieved with sacred emblems, a decoration also found on the vases, but more boldly executed. However, any description gives only a faint idea of the beauty of this garniture. It is the extreme refinement and exceeding grace of these five pieces, as they stand together, that gives the garniture its rare charm.



IN this country where history still is measured by decades a century makes an object an antique. But here is a vase which was in one collection, that of Hamilton Palace, for two hundred years and is generally known, because of that fact, as the "Hamilton Palace vase," passing at the Hamilton Palace sale into the possession of Sir William Bennett.

Flanked by two other vases, it stands in one of the principal cases in the exhibition, and any one wishing to make a study of *famille verte* porcelain

from one of the choicest examples, should examine this vase from all points of view. For, being enamelled in all the colors associated with its class, it thus sums up in itself the chief characteristics of famille verte. It is rouleau shape; the background of rich aubergine covered entirely with a small, unobtrusive floral design in black. On either side is a large panel, which shows the figure of a lady playing with children, these panels forming strikingly graceful details of the decorative scheme. Each of these panels in turn is divided into two smaller ones, respectively of pomegranate and leaf shape. The former contains altar utensils, the latter flowers. Coming over the shoulder is a deep lambrequin design representing brocade; and this brocade design is harmoniously carried out in the diapering of the background for two small panels on the neck, where a large dragon with bifurcated tail, dividing these panels on either side, imparts to the decoration a suggestion of the mystical. It is a seventeenth century vase of the early Kang-Hi period.

Even from this description, although so much less satisfactory than a view of the object described,



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it can be understood why this vase was spontaneously singled out to be honored permanently with the name of the collection to which it belonged for two centuries and to become known to collectors as "the Hamilton Palace vase." In fact if I hadn't fallen in love at sight with the garniture—whose grace and charm may be described as of the feminine order—I would have called attention to this vase and the two remarkable square beaker vases that flank it, immediately after the hawthorn. I am not, however, writing a catalogue, but merely jotting down the impressions made upon me personally by some beautiful Chinese porcelains; and if I spent part of the time worshipping at the shrine of an exquisite garniture that I should have devoted to kotowing before a wonderful vase, all I can do is to apologize to the vase—and take another look at the garniture.



TWO other objects that greatly interested me were a pair of vases that, far fetched as this may seem, reminded me of the rug exhibition. For all through the design there is a "feeling" for gold that made me

think of the Polish carpets with their metal threads. These vases came to the collection of Sir William Bennett from Lady Du Cane, who knew them for four generations and could not tell how much longer they had been in the family. They are of the seventeenth century, Kang-Hi period.

For rarity in scheme of decoration this pair of vases would merit attention, even if there were not the added factors of size and shape to make them impressive. They are large oviform vases, with covers, and the background is of a peculiarly lovely powdered blue covered with a tracery design in gold. In the main portion are four large panels containing altar utensils and flowering trees. A distinctive and most unusual feature is the outlining or edging of these panels with rouge de fer. A decoration of floral branches in small reserves, above and below these panels, is repeated on the covers, and the enamels in all the reserves is in the finest quality of *famille verte*.

A series of minute descriptions of many more objects probably would defeat its purpose and tend to confuse the reader's mind. It is better that, hav-



THE ing had a few of the principal ceramics in the exhibi-
LOTUS tion pointed out to him, he should see these and the
balance of the display for himself, which, however,
must be done before December twelfth, as the ex-
hibition will be closed after that date. But while
anxious to avoid too much detail, there are several
vases that, in addition to beauty of form and color,
have a certain pictorial interest. One of these is
remarkable for the numerous head-dresses, which
are all brought out in black enamel. The vase, of
the Kang-Hi period, is rouleau shape and
large. The figures are court nobles and ladies. The
Emperor Kang-Hi, of whom they wait an audience,
is seen in the upper portion of the vase, in the in-
terior of the palace, and at his rear are two boy
attendants. The Empress is seated on a terrace and
is attended by three court ladies. Another detail are
three of the Buddhistic disciples with boys who bring
tributes.

The rice industry is completely illustrated in
the decoration of a large beaker shape famille verte
vase with oviform body, straight neck and expanding
lip. Near the foot, a man is seen driving a buffalo

and tilling the soil. Above this are figures of girls sorting rice. Farther up again, girls are shown splicing the twine for bales, and on the neck, men are wading through water and sowing the seed. Farther around the vase, girls and children are packing, and by their side men are seen in the act of winnowing the rice. The remainder of the decoration in the neck shows the interior of a factory.



A BLUE hawthorn jar is unique because of the knob on the cover which gives the latter the significance of a mandarin's cap. There is a rare marriage cup—rare because it was the Chinese custom to destroy these cups immediately after the ceremony. A set of three cups and saucers is decorated with peonies and begonia flowers on a rich black enamelled background. A pale green enamel covers the backs of the saucers and the interiors of the cups. There are several figures of great interest, among them a powerful representation of the god of war seated, and a beautiful Kwan-Gin, holding on her right knee the figure of a child, signifying her office as the protector of child-

THE ren. Her throne is represented as an upturned lotus
LOTUS flower. There are several very ancient pieces of the Han and Yuan dynasties which should receive attention from museums.

The jades include a wonderful example in blue in the form of a square vase with flowers of the four seasons carved in high relief on the panels. There is a vase with cover, in two colors, carved from one solid block of jasper, the largest specimen known to geologists and collectors. A sword handle formed of one solid piece of ruby, also the largest known specimen, is encrusted with native cut diamonds, the metal part in gold, inlaid with diamonds, and partly enamelled in brilliant green. It was formerly the property of Tippo Sahib and was presented by him to the Earl of Collingwood at Seringapatan in 1789. It comes from the collection of Captain Peel.

Admiration for the work of the Chinese artists in porcelain is no new thing; nor is its costliness. Making due allowance for time and place, the noblest examples of the art commanded at the period of their production and in China itself prices as high as we pay for them now. Indeed, one authority as-

serts that in proportion they were costlier.

For their beauty was fully appreciated. "The porcelain of the Ta-yi kilns is light and yet strong. It rings with a low jade note, and is famed throughout the city. The fine white bowls surpass hoarfrost and snow." Thus the poet Tu (803-852.)

"As blue as the sky, as clear as a mirror, as thin as paper, and as resonant as a musical stone of jade," reads a rescript of Emperor Tsung (954-959.)

"They have in China," writes an old Arabian traveler, "a very fine clay with which they make vases as transparent as glass; water is seen through them. These vases are made of clay."

Yes, clay;—but under the hand of the artist a jar became a jewel and a teacup a fortune.

